

# LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

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TOWN PLANNING  
IN PRACTICE

## GENERAL REMARKS

Fisher Unwin  
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FIRST GARDEN CITY LIMITED  
ESTATE OFFICE

June 1909



# LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

## GENERAL REMARKS

*(January, 1909)*

### **Access and Situation**

The Estate lies between Hitchin and Baldock, on the Northern boundary of Hertfordshire. Letchworth Station is thirty-four miles from London (King's Cross) and the next Station beyond, Hitchin Station, an important junction on the Great Northern and Midland Railways. Many express trains reach it from London in from thirty-nine to forty-two minutes. There are cheap bookings by fast trains on two days per week to London. The Great Northern Railway main line to Cambridge intersects the Estate.

The Estate is situate about 350 feet above sea level, in a high bracing position, and commands some charming and picturesque views of the surrounding country. It is bounded on the east by the Weston range of chalk hills and the old Great North Road, London to York; to the west are seen the Pegsdon Hills, and views of the town of Hitchin; charming views of the valley of the River Ivel lie to the north, while the south commands much open and well-wooded country.

**Adjoining Towns** Letchworth is by no means isolated. It is two miles from Hitchin and Baldock, two charming old fashioned towns, and is easily accessible to both by train. At Hitchin (population 12,000) there are good shops and social attractions although Letchworth is equally well provided in these respects.



**Agricultural Belt** It is one of the fundamental principles of the Garden City scheme that a wide belt of land surrounding the new town should be permanently reserved for agricultural purposes. The value of this will immediately be seen. It limits the area of the town, so that it cannot go straggling out in all directions in the way that our modern suburbs grow; it secures for all time the proximity of the country to the town with the fresh air and freedom that the country gives; and it further brings the agricultural industry into immediate contact with its market, and all the social advantages and attractions of the town. With this object in view, about 2,500 acres, consisting of nearly two-thirds of the Estate, have been retained for agricultural purposes, all of which is let—and a considerable part of it let for small holdings.



**Approval of Buildings** All plans, sections, etc., of Buildings must be submitted to the Company for approval; blank abstract forms, for the filling up of Specifications, and copies of the Company's

Building Regulations, can be obtained on application at the Estate Office. The Company devote considerable care to the approval of plans in order that the interests of other leaseholders may be protected ; and also in the supervision of the quality and sanitation of the houses under construction.



**Area** The area of the Garden City Estate is 3,818 acres, the whole of which is admirably suited for either building purposes or for the best system of agricultural development. A noteworthy feature of the Estate is its entire freedom from waste or marsh land. 1,300 acres have been retrained for the site of the City, the remainder being devoted to the Agricultural Belt, Open Spaces, Commons, Golf Links, etc.



**Athletics** The Company has recently laid down a cricket ground, consisting of five acres, at Letchworth Corner, which has been let to the *Letchworth Cricket Club*, available to all residents.

The Company has also laid down to pasture about eleven acres of land, between the factory sites and Baldock Road, for an intended cricket and athletic ground.

There are also good *Tennis, Football, Hockey, and Golf Clubs*, which are well patronised by the inhabitants.

There is an excellent and sheltered open-air swimming bath provided by the Company, adjoining Norton Way.



**Banks** The London City and Midland Bank, Ltd, have imposing premises in Leys Avenue; and Barclay and Co., Ltd, have temporary accommodation in Leys Avenue, pending the occupation of a spacious bank which they have just erected at the junction of Main Avenue and Station Road, opposite the Estate Offices of First Garden City, Ltd.



**Building Material** Building material is plentiful in the neighbourhood and can be obtained cheaply on the site. Fletton bricks are from 20/- per thousand.



**Building Societies** The following societies are specially prepared to make advances upon property at Letchworth :

The Letchworth Mutual Permanent Building Society, Station Road, Letchworth.

Co-operative Permanent Building Society, 22 Red Lion Square, W.C. and 14 Icknield Way, Letchworth.

First Garden City Mortgage and Investment Company, Ltd, Station Road, Letchworth.

The British Homes Assurance Corporation, Ltd, 6 Paul Street, Finsbury, London, W.C.

In addition to the above there are investment and mortgage Companies prepared to consider advances from 60 per cent to 80 per cent upon property erected at Letchworth, which is accepted as an ordinary class of investment.



**Building Regulations** The Regulations adopted by the Company, while not being oppressive, are sufficiently stringent to ensure sound and substantial building. They are framed on the basis of the Local Government Board's Model Bye-Laws, and embody those of the Hitchin Rural District Council.

Plans of houses to be erected are required by the Company before commencing work. It does not ask for elaborate elevations: it will be satisfied with simple designs, but attaches importance to the proportions of buildings and their suitability to the site.

As usual in other districts, plans have to be approved also by the Local Authority, the Hitchin Rural District Council.

In the case of houses erected on the Agricultural Belt, the above regulations are somewhat modified. Copies of the Company's regulations may be obtained from the Offices at Letchworth or Holborn, price 6d. net.

**Central Square** For the proposed Central Square of the City, a tract of level land has been reserved on Broadway (late Main Avenue) about 250 yards from the Estate Office. Its position can easily be located by three isolated oak trees. Roads are being constructed radiating from the Central Square, which will give easy access to all parts of the City, and which are to be so arranged that glimpses of the open country may be obtained along them from the heart of the City, while affording to those approaching from the outskirts good views of the buildings in the Central Square.



**Churches** There are Parish Churches at Letchworth, Willian, and Norton and Radwell, all on or immediately adjacent to the Estate. A Mission Church in connection with Letchworth Parish Church has recently been erected in Norton Way, and is used for services. There is a well-appointed Free Church and a building for the Society of Friends. Other religious services are held in the Howard Hall, Co-operative Hall and at the Pixmore Institute. A Roman Catholic Church has just been erected near the future Central Square, and is open for worship. The Wesleyan body have acquired land and are about to build. The Company offer reduced terms for sites for religious purposes.

**Design of the City**

The plan of the City has been prepared after much thought and consideration for what already exists in the way of county roads, commons, parks, plantations and trees. Anything of special natural beauty has been preserved and worked into the plan of the town, and the greatest possible advantage has been taken of the contour of the land. The shape of the Estate is oblong, and the main line of the Great Northern Railway to Cambridge runs through the middle of it. The main road from Hitchin to Baldock crosses the southern portion of the Estate. There is another county road running east and west through Norton Village and the northern portion of the Estate. The ancient British highway, "Icknield Way," runs through the Estate near the railway.

**Development of Estate**

(November, 1908):

New roads made, over 9 miles.

Length of water mains,  $17\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

Capacity of reservoir, 250,000 gallons.

Situation and altitude of reservoir: situate on Weston Hills, south-east of the Estate, about 480 feet above sea level, and 130 feet above the highest point on the Estate. Sewers constructed,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

Number of houses on the Estate at time of purchase, 104.

Number of properties at present time built or building

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(all connected to the Company's water service), 1,122  
Number of houses connected with gas, . . . 980

**Drainage** The Estate is excellently situate for urban development, and over 1,000 acres in the centre can be drained to one point. Over eleven miles of sewers have already been laid along the roads on which development is taking place, and land at a considerable distance therefrom has been set aside for the disposal of sewage; ultimately larger sewerage works will be established at a still greater distance from the town area.

**Educational Facilities** There are public elementary and private schools at Letchworth, and an excellent Grammar School and good private schools in Hitchin.

**Electricity** The First Garden City, Ltd, Electricity Works supplies current for power and light within the factory area at very low charges.

**Estate Office** The Estate Office of First Garden City, Ltd, is situate on Broadway, two minutes from the south side of the railway station. All information regarding the Estate, sites to let, etc., can be obtained here. Office hours, 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

**Factory Sites** The factories are grouped together on the eastern portion of the Estate, adjoining the railway, and are screened from the residential and shopping area by a hill and belt of trees. Ask for special circular, "Why manufacturers move to Letchworth."



**Fire Brigade** A Volunteer Fire Brigade and Ambulance Corps has been formed. The Estate is also served by the Hitchin and Baldock Brigades.



**Flora** The soil of the Estate is admirably suited for flower culture, especially of perennials, and a successful attempt has been made to repopularize the old-fashioned flowers, once the glory of village gardens, and already many gardens are gay for quite nine months of the year. To demonstrate the decorative value of these herbaceous perennials, the Company have procured nearly a thousand of the most useful varieties, and as these increase they are being transferred to reserved plots and other spaces which, being temporarily unoccupied, would soon otherwise become muddy wastes.

In order to avoid the monotonous repetition of a few varieties of trees and shrubs, as seen in most towns, a collection of about 250 varieties of ornamental trees and shrubs, suitable for small gardens, has been planted near Letchworth Railway Station, and labelled,

with a view to encouraging their adoption. The situation being high and bracing, many of the most ornamental trees and shrubs may be planted with safety, as the growth ripens well, and enables the trees to withstand the winter.



**Free Leases** The Company have arranged that leases may, if taken in the Company's usual form and without variation, be granted free of cost, on the lessee paying the stamp duty on such agreement for lease and lease respectively.



**Fruit Growing** Letchworth is admirably situate for fruit growing, and it is specially noticeable that in fruit trees the buds set early and the wood ripens thoroughly before the severe frosts which cause so much damage in many fruit districts. Much of the soil being a deep loam on gravel or calcareous boulder earth, there is a good prospect for fruit farming, and already several farms have been established. The old trees on the Estate indicate a specially fine apple-growing district, as the fruit is always firm, the colour well up, and the trees always well spurred for fruiting.



**Gas Works** The Company's Gas Works lie beyond the factories, and are well hidden by a belt of trees. They contain all the latest improvements, are the most

up-to-date in the country, and are capable of producing 20,000,000 cubic feet of gas per annum.

The Company's bold policy has no doubt popularised the use of gas, the present rate being 3s. net per thousand feet for lighting, and lower for factory power purposes. These charges include laying ordinary service pipes to the houses, and free use of meter and a standard type of cooking stove. Gas mains have been laid along the principal thoroughfares.



**Golf** The Golf Links are charmingly situate in Letchworth Park, and consist of nine holes (shortly to be increased to twelve), under the control of the Letchworth Golf Trust, Ltd, which employs the services of a well-known and capable professional to keep the course in order and give lessons to members when required. The hon. secretary of the Club, Mr C. E. Flemming, The Mays, Letchworth, will be glad to give full particulars to intending members and visitors.



**Gravel** Good gravel and sand is obtainable on the Estate, and is in much demand for building purposes.



**Health Statistics** The health of the inhabitants of the Garden City Estate is excellent, and, owing to the wise and careful way in which the City is planned, is likely to remain so. The death-rate for 1907 averaged 4.8 per 1,000, and the birth-rate 15.75 per 1,000.

It is a remarkable fact that, in spite of the enormous increase in the population, the average death-rate for the district remains very low, as will be seen from the following table, from figures supplied by Dr F. W. Langston Day, medical officer for the district :

	1902.	1903.	1904.	1905.	1906.	1907.
Population	400	400	800	1,600	3,500	5,000
Deaths.	.	10	5	9	4	11

The fact that one of the objects of the Company is to restrict the average number of houses per acre, and that the density of the population is not likely to average more than ten persons to the acre, indicates that the new town is likely to have exceptional advantages from a health point of view. Towns which possess crowded districts or slums of any description, however healthily situated, are necessarily productive of unhealthy conditions, which, although they only affect the well-to-do resident or the better class artisan in an indirect manner, undoubtedly are the cause of a large amount of disease amongst all classes, and incidentally tend to increase the local rates and taxes.



**Hotels and Inns** There are four temperance hotels, two licensed inns and one unlicensed inn, on the Estate.

BALMORAL HOTEL is situate in Norton Way and faces Howard Park. It is about six minutes from the Station and is under entirely new management.

THE CENTRAL (late STATION) HOTEL is most advantageously placed at the corner of Norton Way and Station Road, and is within four minutes' walk of Letchworth Railway Station. It is now under entirely new management.

LETCHWORTH HALL (first-class residential Hotel) is beautifully situate off Letchworth Lane, and adjoining and overlooking the finely-timbered Letchworth Park, which contains the golf links. Letchworth Hall contains many features of great interest, including a large baronial hall and fine Jacobean mantelpiece. The management of the hotel is now under the control of the First Garden City Ltd.

THE SIMPLE LIFE HOTEL is in Leys Avenue, two minutes from Station, and caters specially for the Food Reformer.

THE SKITTLES INN, in Nevells Road, is a large and commodious Public House (unlicensed), fitted up and conducted on the lines of the old-fashioned Inns. It is an experiment undertaken by Mr Aneurin Williams, J.P., and Mr Edward Cadbury for providing the social advantages of a Public House without the sale of intoxicants. It is open daily from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and for a shorter time on Sundays.

THE FOX INN (fully licensed), in the charming old village of Willian, about two miles from Letchworth Station and two and a half miles from Hitchin Station, has been leased to the People's Refreshment House

Association, Ltd, and has been very much improved and added to, so as to provide excellent accommodation for residence and meals.

THE THREE HORSESHOES INN (fully licensed), at Norton, is also under the management of the People's Refreshment House Association, Ltd, and caters for the visitor in every way. There is a bowling green attached.

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#### **How to Take a Building Plot at Letchworth**

The process under which land can be leased for the purpose of erecting a house or other premises is as follows:

The intending lessee selects from the schedule a plot at a fixed ground-rent per annum on long lease. A minimum value of house or premises to be erected thereon is stated, and a time is agreed within which the building is to be completed (or undertaken). The Company allows a pepper-corn rent for the first three months of the term.

A *Preliminary Agreement* containing these particulars is first signed by the lessee and confirmed by the Company.

The usual *Building Agreement* is then drawn up and signed by the lessee and the Company, in which

- (a) *The Lessee* agrees to erect a house or premises on the plot to his own design, when the drawings shall

have been agreed with the Company, in compliance with the Building Regulations.

(b) *The Company* agrees to grant a lease of the land when the house or premises have been completed and are fit for occupation.

When the house or premises have been completed, a certificate of completion is issued, and the *Lease* is then granted by the Company.

The conditions of the *Lease* are not onerous, and have only been drawn up to the end that the interests of present and future residents may be safeguarded.

The Company give every possible assistance to intending lessees.

It should be clearly understood that lessees are quite at liberty to sell or dispose of their property and transfer their leases. Considerable business in the purchase and sale of houses is constantly proceeding on the Estate.

### **Halls and Institutions**

The Mrs Howard Memorial Hall (with which is grouped the Girls' Club) in Norton Way, is a feature of special interest in Letchworth, being the recognised centre of many social and other activities. The Co-operative Hall and the Pixmore Institute are also available for Meetings and social gatherings. The Company have recently opened a Public Reading Room near the centre of the town, available to all residents at a nominal weekly subscription.

**Land** The Directors of First Garden City, Ltd, in  
**Tenure** order that the unearned increment may be enjoyed by the community, have decided that the leasehold system of tenure is necessary. Leases for building land are granted by the Company for a term of ninety-nine years at a fixed ground-rent, or if desired with an option, on special terms being made, of renewing the lease for a further ninety-nine years at a rent to be agreed by reference to independent valuation, irrespective of the value of buildings erected thereon. A building agreement is in the first instance entered into by the proposed lessee, containing undertakings on the lessee's part to build within a fixed period (usually six months from the date of such agreement), and on the Company's part to grant a lease on the completion of such buildings, and on the fulfilment of the conditions of such agreement (*See* paragraph (b) page 17).

First Garden City, Ltd, in proposing to establish a model city for residential and industrial purposes, is not entering upon a land speculation; it is not desirous of reaping for its shareholders the entire profit which will accrue from the conversion of agricultural land into building land, and from mere building land into the site of a well and carefully developed city, and—subject to a cumulative dividend of five per cent per annum, payable out of profits, in accordance with its Memorandum of Association—it has deprived itself

and its successors of the power to do so. As the surplus profits of the Company cannot, therefore, be retained by the Company, they will go to the lessees and tenants in one way or another. Holding land under the Company has this great advantage, that the reversion of the lessees' and tenants' improvements will ultimately go to the community as a whole, and not to private individuals.

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**Local Authorities** The whole of the Estate is contained within the Hitchin Union, and (with the exception of a few acres in the Baldock Urban District and Biggleswade Rural District) is included in the area of the Hitchin Rural District. The parishes of Letchworth, Norton, and a part of Willian, are now combined in a new civil parish, and a Parish Council has been created. The Estate includes what was hitherto the whole of the parishes of Letchworth and Norton, and parts of Willian, Great Wymondley, Baldock, Radwell and Stotfold (Beds).

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**London Offices** The London Offices of the Company are at 326a High Holborn, W.C., where all information regarding the Estate, schedules of sites to let, plans, prospectuses, etc., can be obtained: Office

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Hours, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (from May 1 to September 30, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.).



**Manufactures** The industries carried on in Letchworth comprise bookbinding, letter-press and other branches of the printing trade, the manufacture of photo-paper, mineral waters, asphalte, embroidery, lace, motor cars, vacuum brakes, oil engines, and the craft of weaving.



**Open Spaces** The Company, in laying out the Estate, made ample provision for open spaces, as no less than 200 acres have been set aside with that intention, in addition to the agricultural belt and many small greens, etc., in various parts of the Estate. Norton Common is beautifully wooded, and comprises seventy acres, two minutes' walk from the northern exit of Letchworth Station. Letchworth Park is a finely-timbered and undulating piece of country in the south-west corner of the Estate, and contains the links of the Letchworth Golf Club. The Park consists of about sixty-two acres, and fine views of it may be obtained from the Hitchin Road.

**Present Demand  
for Houses,  
Cottages, &c.**

There is a large and increasing demand for villa residences, cottages and shops on the Estate, and building operations can be advantageously undertaken by builders desiring a suitable investment for capital.

**Private  
Residences**

The building land on the Estate is offered on special leasehold conditions, with a well-defined scheme of future development, and is worth the consideration of those desirous of securing excellent sites for the erection of private residences. The definite town planning adopted by the Company effectually prevents the possibility of property being depreciated, or outlook and air-space round the plots being unduly obscured—a possibility which is only too apparent in an ordinary suburban building estate.

**Population**

Provision is made for a population of 30,000 persons in the town area, and about 35,000 including the population engaged in agricultural pursuits. The density of the population will average about twenty-three per acre in the town area, and nine per acre over the whole Estate. The present population is estimated at about 6,000.

**Possession of Land** Immediate possession can be given of most of the building sites offered by the Company.



**Postal and other Facilities** There are now three post offices on the Estate (Station Road, Letchworth Corner and Willian) with full postal and telegraph facilities, and the collection and delivery of letters is very good. A continuous day and night telephone service is established, and many of the residents are subscribers and avail themselves of this convenience.



**Rates** The rates of Letchworth for the past half-year were 2s. 4d. in the £ (including County, District, Poor and Parish Rates). This is equal to 4s. 8d. per annum. There seems no reason to suppose that the rates will rise much above this, and eventually they should fall again, as ground rents of the Town, after paying 5 per cent. on the Company's Share Capital, are by the Memorandum of Association to be devoted to the benefit of the town or its inhabitants

**Rents** The present rental of land for cottages and residences varies from £15 to £30 per acre, according to situation. Not more than twelve houses may be erected on a net acre of land, and the annual ground-rent of a cottage in the town area may therefore be had at present from 30s. upwards. The rent is only charged on the net amount of land occupied, and not into the centre of the roadway in front, as in many districts. In respect of plots shown in the Company's schedule (to be obtained at the Estate Office), the ground-rent generally covers the cost of good road construction, and laying of sewer, gas, and water mains.



**Roads** At the time the Estate was purchased (September, 1903), there were only three roads of any importance, viz., the main road from Hitchin to Baldock, running right across the Estate parallel to the railway; a road running east and west through Norton village, in the northern half of the Estate; and Letchworth Lane, running from the Baldock Road at Letchworth Corner to the village of Willian. Since that time, however, the Company have constructed eight miles of roads, and the most important of these is Norton Way, which connects Norton with Letchworth. The principal road of the City will be the Broadway, which is to be from 100 to 120ft wide,

and will run from the Hitchin Road, opposite Letchworth Park, to the railway, a distance of about one mile. In all the existing roads constructed by the Company ample provision has been made for future widening, and all are being planted with different varieties of trees. The roadway and footpaths fronting the plots are usually formed by the Company without charge to the lessee, the lessee maintaining the same under the lease at his own expense, until such time as the roads are taken over by the Local Authority. Most of the roads are already lighted.

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**Sewers** The water carriage system is in force, and most of the plots offered are already seweried, or can be immediately seweried. The main sewer is laid free of cost to the lessee in most cases, the Company making the connection with the lessee's drain at the front boundary of the plot nearest such main sewer for £3 3s. per connection.

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**Shops** The present shopping area in Station Road and Leys Avenue is being rapidly covered with large and well-equipped shop premises. There are already fifty-three shops built, and this number is being steadily increased.

**Social Life** The social life of the new town is well developed, and has many interesting features.

An indication of the activity and wide interests of the residents is shown by the list of organisations and societies which have been formed during the past two years. All classes of the community are catered for, and it may safely be said that no town in the country of its size has anything like the social activity which is found at Letchworth.

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**Small Holdings** It is the definite policy of the Directors of the Company to encourage the establishment of small holdings, and up to the present 420 acres of land on the agricultural belt have been let for this purpose. No more land is available at present as it is not desirable to force the demand unduly.

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**Street Trees** The street trees in Letchworth are having special attention, and as far as possible, a different variety of tree will be used in each street. Already thirty-four varieties have been used and promise well in the near future, as they seem to quickly establish themselves. Advantage has been taken of information generously placed at the Com-

pany's disposal by some of the chief towns of Northern Europe, and already Letchworth is a long way ahead of any other town in England in the matter of variety in street trees. Every variety used has been thoroughly tested in some Continental town where the climatic conditions are similar to those at Letchworth. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the adoption of pear and other fruit trees in the streets. Pears produce magnificent effects in many Continental towns, and are being given a fair trial at Letchworth. It must be remembered that in developing a new estate many factors arise to disturb the growth of street trees in the early stages. Each road has sewer, gas and water, and each house has connections for each of these facilities, so that some allowance must be made by the visitor interested in street tree planting.



**Subsoil** The subsoil of the Estate is chalk, the upper soil being sandy loam, in some parts clay, with beds of sand and gravel.



**Timber** All timber is preserved, and much planting has been and will be done. Hedges will be retained as a feature of the Estate.

**Water** The Company have undertaken the whole water supply, under expert advice, and a pumping station has been erected, a reservoir constructed and water mains laid over some miles of the Estate. Water is obtained from 2-bore-holes 200 feet deep, protected by steel tubing, around which the Company will preserve a considerable area of un-built-on land. The reservoir lies at an altitude of about 130 feet above any other part of the Estate, a good pressure for all purposes thus being ensured. The average pressure is 70 lbs. per square inch, and the quality is excellent. The Company's charges are calculated at 6 per cent to  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on the assessed rental, or for trade purposes by meter.



*The foregoing general remarks will not be considered as the basis of any contract between the Company or any prospective Tenant or Lessee, or as embodied therein.*

## HOW TO BECOME A RESIDENT IN GARDEN CITY

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**Y**OU can lease one of the plots of land offered by First Garden City Limited and build your own house (Mortgages and Advances upon buildings can be effected through various Societies and Companies).

¶ You can purchase one of the houses already erected by builders on the Estate.

¶ You can rent a house on a weekly, quarterly or yearly tenancy (Note: There is a heavy demand for houses and there are very few available except for artisans)

¶ You cannot do better than pay a visit to the Estate and see the excellent building plots available for development.

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